

January 5, 2005

Surface Transportation Board  
Case Control Unit  
Washington, DC 20423  
Attn: Rini Ghosh  
STB Docket No. FD 34284

Received 1/12/05

EI-1356

I was able to attend the public hearing held on December 2, 2004 at the Medina County Fair Hall in Hondo, Texas regarding the draft Environmental Impact Statement, and offer my written comments.

I am a 5<sup>th</sup> generation descendant of Texas German immigrants, and was born in the Texas Hill Country. I have a full appreciation of its natural beauty, and therefore have a strong inclination to support preservation of rural Texas in its pristine condition whenever practical.

I am also a strong supporter of the American free-enterprise system, and believe that the most citizens are best served by allowing our businesses to flourish. I believe we must not hamstring our country with unnecessary and expensive stumbling blocks for our people and our businesses.

I am a civil engineer with fifty years experience in general construction, both as an employee and owner. We completed many Corp of Engineer projects, schools, historical restorations, and even some railroad work. The many advantages to all our citizens of a free, unencumbered business environment is deeply understood and appreciated by me.

Heinrich and Johanna Schweers are my great great grandparents. They were married in 1858, and had the "Henry Schweers House" shown on your maps constructed that same year. My grandfather, Henry Schweers, was born and reared in this home along with his thirteen (13) siblings.

Some of my 1<sup>st</sup> cousins and I first learned of the existence of these historic homes after a family reunion on June 4, 1995... We decided that we should attempt to acquire and restore the Henry Schweers Home then owned by William Schweers. He died unexpectedly in 1998. Shortly afterward, Vulcan Material Company purchased the property, which included the Henry Schweers and the William Schweers Historic Homes, for a proposed railroad right-of-way to a proposed rock quarry.

In early 2001, we met with representatives of Vulcan Material Company about the possibility of purchasing the Henry Schweers home. To our delight, they were very supportive of our interest. Subsequently, they have helped us create our non-profit Schweers Historical Foundation, Inc., and are donating both the Henry and the William Schweers homes, including some acreage. They did all this and more, yet not knowing that the railroad track would be approved for construction. Obviously, we hold this fine company in highest esteem. They are a strong community-oriented firm, and would prove to be an important asset to Medina County.

I provide the above information so you can better know my background, and the opinions I express herein. Hopefully they are constructive and unbiased.

After perusal of your supporting documents, I have the following comments regarding the routes:

1. **Alternative 1** skirts along the Quihi Creek quite a distance, which is not good for wildlife habitat. It then crosses the creek near large ponds and marshes teeming with wildlife, and then passes within 125 feet of the historic William Schweers Home and between the historic Heyo Schweers Home (noted as ruins). It is also two (2) miles longer than the Proposed Route. This is not a good route!
2. **Alternate 2** likewise cross the Quihi Creek at the small, spring-fed ponds and marshes, then passes between the Schweers family cemetery, and the Henry Schweers Home (within 250 feet). It also crosses an area near the Saathoff Historic Home and their family cemetery located south of the Quihi

Creek on the Pichot property. This area has lots of historic and archaeological locations. I consider this not a good Alternate route. This route is noted as 1000 feet longer than the Proposed Route.

3. **Alternate 3** passes within 250 feet of the Oeffinger Cottage, and between the two (2) Saathoff Cottages, and the Cottage Ruins noted. It is 2500 lineal feet longer than the Proposed Route. This is a better route than Alternates 1 and 2 in my opinion, but not the preferred.
4. **The No-Build Alternative** would be a horrible selection from the viewpoint of public safety, truck road traffic, noise, public nuisance, unsightliness, dust, environment, and economy.
5. **The Proposed Route** is by far the superior, in my opinion. It crosses the Quihi Creek at a location that often is dry, and has no marches, or significant ponds. It appears to take advantage of the existing pipe line right-of-way. It is 250 lineal feet from the Henry Schweers Historic Home, but otherwise avoids close proximity of other historic structures and environmentally sensitive areas. I also think it will prove to be the most economically feasible point to cross the Quihi Creek, and will have minimal effect on wildlife. It will be screened somewhat by existing trees.

Regarding Environmental Impact issues, I offer the following:

1. **Transportation and Traffic Safety:** Vulcan Material Company anticipates two loaded 100-car trains and two empty 100-car trains to and from the quarry in a 24 hour period. Each rail car is equivalent to about five (5) truck loads. Thus it would require approximately 2000 truck trips per day (loaded and empty). This many trucks would create huge traffic and safety problems on the roads and highways, not to mention high road wear & tear, and heavy dust creation. Shipping by rail is the logical, pragmatic and best means of shipping their products.
2. **Water Resources:** Vulcan will be using state-of-the-art plant equipment which recycles their water. Hence, they will not be using large amounts of water. Limestone is an essential commodity throughout our land, and it will take some water consumption to ship it in a clean state as required by our environmental laws. All our industries, businesses, residences, and farms & ranches need and consume water. This is normal, and expected!
3. **Noise:** I live in busy New Braunfels, Texas which has two railroad tracks and several rock quarries within the city limits. I have lived here about 15 years, and don't recall hearing the blasts at the quarries one time! I lived within several blocks from a railroad track crossing the Guadalupe River. I seldom was aware of a train passing through town. However now I live high on a hill about four miles from the tracks, and I can now hear the trains tooting their whistles in a distance, but it is not objectionable and they do not wake me up at nights. I live about ½ miles from IH 35, and I can always hear the noise of the trucks and cars! Trees and hills baffle noise, and you can get so accustomed to it that you are not even aware of the noise. Noise from the trains and quarries in New Braunfels is not an issue, and we are a very politically minded town. Noise is a part of progress, and Quihi and Medina County will be progressing more and more as time goes by. They will get used to it, and it will become a non-issue!
4. **Land Use:** Some folks have argued that their land will lose value because of the railroad tracks. I think it is likely that land values will increase as the area grows and demand for shipment by rail grows. I doubt that the farm and ranch values will decrease at all. Several homes might possibly lose value initially, but then stabilize after people realize their life hasn't changed because of the tracks and trains.
5. **Aesthetics:** I do not personally find a train working its way across the countryside a problem regarding aesthetics. In fact, I think they are rather interesting. This is happening every day across the cities, towns, and countryside in America, and allows us to develop power, economic strength, and vitality. It is absolutely necessary to our well being. The quarry is in a very remote area, and will not affect aesthetics from neighbors or roadways. People build these things totally out of proportion to reality because it's something new. Once the novelty wears off, they will hardly notice the bridge

and tracks and the trains as they pass any given point in five minutes at 20 mph. This is in a remote area on country roads with light traffic!

6. **Vibration:** With reference to the letter dated October 23, 2003, a copy of a study by SEA was enclosed regarding potential vibration impacts to cultural resources in the area of the proposed project. This was provided to assist in review of the report requested in the October 10, 2003 letter which included the Preliminary Cultural Resources Assessment Report for the proposed rail and construction operation. Para. 1.2.1.1 Construction: The last sentence concludes, "Based on the distance from the source of the proposed construction to known cultural resources, there would be *no significant impact* to known cultural resources as a result of ground-borne vibration. Para. 1.2.1.2 Operation: The last sentence concludes, "The closest historic structure to the proposed route would be at least 250 feet from the tracks. No cultural resource would be located within the 45-foot impact distance from the tracts. Thus, there would be *no ground-borne vibration impacts to known cultural resources* as a result of proposed railroad operations. This professional study regarding vibrations from construction and operations of the trains, etc. clearly show that vibrations will not adversely affect the various structures along the Proposed Route.
7. **Dust:** It is my judgment that four train trips per day with railroad cars rolling on steel rails transporting recently washed limestone aggregate creates a lot less dust than 1800 truck trips per day driving down the highways and county roads. Vulcan has the option to use trucks if they cannot ship by rail. Shipping by rail is the superior means of shipping their limestone products.
8. **Cultural Resources.** On paragraph 3.1, page 28 is stated, "SEA's cultural resources assessment preliminarily concludes that the proposed construction and operation of SGR's rail line *would not directly impact or affect* any know significant cultural resources.
9. **Cumulative Impacts:** The positive impacts will be the new jobs, added tax money for the schools, roads, etc, and the support of a strong community-oriented company in the area (why do you think San Antonio was so pleased to have Toyota build their new plant in the area?). These are important benefits for the young folks, the working people, and the tax paying public! Only the rich that have the "I've got mine, you get yours" mentality would not appreciate these beneficial facts! All of the reasonable objections can be mitigated, and Vulcan appears willing to resolve legitimate issues. There will be negligible negative impact for traffic, safety, water resources, vibration, cultural resources, land use, and quarry noise. For very few people, train noise initially might be a problem, but in time they will become accustomed, and give it little notice. I think the positives outweigh the negatives. Quihi and Medina County will experience considerable growth soon, and that is good as long as they plan for it to happen in the right way.

This concludes my written comments. I appreciate the time and professional approach the STB, the SEA, the URS Corporation of Austin and the Vulcan Material Company and the SGR have taken to protect the interests of the Quihi community, the preservation of our history, etc., and at the same time make some progress in providing important materials for our industries.

Thank you!



Donald S. Schoch